

Interoperability of digital interactive television services

2007/2152(INI) - 13/11/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Henri **WEBER** (PES, FR) on the interoperability of digital interactive television services. The resolution was adopted by 593 votes in favour to 40 against with 18 abstentions.

The report affirms that the new audiovisual technologies should allow the broadcasting of pluralist information and quality programmes, accessible to an ever increasing number of citizens. It points out that respect for the pluralism of information and diversity of content is not automatically guaranteed by technological progress but must be implemented by the national and European public authorities through an active, steadfast and vigilant policy. Given the role of television in a globalised society, the technical and legislative choices relating to interoperability should be not merely of an economic nature, but also of a social and cultural nature, and stresses that attention should be paid above all to users' interests.

Succeeding in the digital transition and promoting open standards: Parliament felt that the success, in as short a time as possible, of the transition from analog to digital is a prerequisite and a priority and was concerned about possible delays in meeting the 2012 deadline. The coordinated development of digital television at Community level is essential if users are to benefit from the advantages of the internal market and in order to reduce the price of television receiving equipment and achieve greater penetration by digital interactive television services. Accordingly, Parliament urged the Commission to support the Member States in drawing up a common plan of action at Community level. Member States are called upon to speed up the transfer to digital television, taking account of market demand and topographical and regional demographic factors. Those Member States which have not yet drawn up a national plan for the full switchover to digital television should do so by the end of 2008.

Parliament fully supported the Commission's approach in terms of its intention to cooperate fully with the Member States with a view to switching over to digital television successfully and facilitating interactive digital services. It reiterated that imposing a single standard by legal means was not the right solution but only a final sanction, but it did not approve of market intervention alone as a means of resolving the problem of interactivity. Parliament shared the Commission's view that it would be advisable to continue promoting open standards such as MHP or MHEG-5, which were recognised by European standards bodies, in relation to the switchover to digital and the interoperability of services. Members maintained that these open standards were the most appropriate ones for ensuring the technological neutrality of networks and the free movement of information, respecting the special necessities of countries where frequency capacities were limited.

The Commission was urged to continue actively to promote the introduction of open European digital television standards in all regions of the world and to encourage international cooperation in this area, thereby ensuring the widest possible access to digital content. Parliament regretted that interactive television in the EU had ultimately proved to be less commercially successful than expected. It called on the Commission to study the reasons for this phenomenon and to submit regular reports on the efforts made by the Commission and the Member States to develop the digital television market and its numerous offshoots. It was essential to provide consumers with more information on the opportunities offered by digital platforms and the necessary equipment, so that they are able to make informed technical and cultural choices. Parliament called on the Commission to help the Member States and local authorities, by disseminating best practices, to exploit the potential of the new technologies in order to communicate with their citizens more effectively.

The need to consider the impact and mastery of the new technologies: Parliament invited the Commission and Member States to inform the public about future developments in digital interactive television services, and recommended that digital television service providers take active steps to inform users about existing interactive services. It stressed the importance of discussing at European level the social and cultural implications of the digital society and the adaptation of national education systems to the cultural and social changes brought about by the new technologies. Member States were asked to establish mechanisms which guarantee a non-discriminatory structure for electronic programme guides that can guide users through the digital services offered.

Lastly, Parliament pointed out that the European audiovisual model was based on a creative dichotomy between public and private audiovisual services. It stressed that under no circumstances should the new technologies disturb that balance by weakening the competitiveness of the public sector, which should continue to have guaranteed access to digital platforms.